

Faculty of Music
University of Toronto

Thursday evening series

JANACEK QUARTET

Bohumil Smejkal, *violin*
Adolf Sykora, *violin*
Jiri Kratochvil, *viola*
Karel Krafka, *cello*

Walter Hall
Edward Johnson Building

February 28, 1974 at 8:30 p.m.

PROGRAM

Quartet in D Major, K. 575 Mozart

Allegretto
Andante
Menuetto and Trio
Allegretto

As are the Janacek and Dvorak quartets, the D major quartet of Mozart is a late work. This work is the first of the "Prussian Quartets" which were intended to be dedicated to King Friedrich Wilhelm in Berlin. The three "Prussian Quartets", (K 575, 589, 590) were written during a period of financial distress (the K 575 is dated June 1789, Vienna), and it is interesting to note that the D major quartet employs incipits, in its first and second movements, from sketches dating back to the more fortunate Milan period (ca. 1770). In hope of alleviating some of his financial trouble, Mozart incorporated much soloistic cello material in hope of accommodating the virtuosity of the king — an amateur cellist. Dialogues between the first violin and the cello form the highlights of movements one and two.

The second movement is an interesting set of variations built around a more developmental core. Here, the less remote, outer variations are presented by the upper three parts, while the cello has solely a foundational role. However, the developmental portion of the movement entails a lyrical, thematic interchange between the cello (involving extension into the high register), and each of the two violins.

The Trio from the third movement is a genuine cello solo, whereby thematic material is taken up by the other three strings only briefly at the end.

The finale is a Rondo based on a lyrical theme. Intensity is achieved through contrapuntal interest and enrichment of the Rondo theme on its return.

Quartet No. 2 Leos Janacek (1854-1928)

Andante
Adagio
Moderato
Allegro

Janacek, like Smetana, wrote only two works for the quartet medium. The earlier, Quartet No. 1, (1923) was inspired by Tolstoy's short story "The Kreutzer Sonata". Similarly, the later quartet (1928) is programmatic, but to a more detailed extent. Subtitled "Intimate Letters", the work outlines the composer's passion for a woman who was forty years younger than Janacek, and his letters addressed to her outline particulars of their hypothetical life together, including such intimate details as the birth of an imaginary son.

Like most Slavic composers of the period, Janacek was greatly interested in the folk music of his native country, which was Moravia. This study manifests itself in the wonderful settings of many folk melodies in this Quartet No. 2. Characteristic devices include the setting of the theme in parallel thirds or sixths, melodic accompaniments comprised of low register trills, ostinati arpeggi, or pedal points, and combination of two themes. The net result is an impression of contrasting, alternating sections: first a climax of rhythmic, melodious, tonally clear folk melodies, then a period of rather indistinct, tonally ambiguous sonority. This feature, common to all four movements, causes the work to be perceived as sketchy and fragmentary, and frequent alterations of tempo render the movement titles almost superfluous.

Quartet in A Flat Major, Op. 105. Dvorak

Adagio ma non troppo — Allegro appassionato

Molto Vivace

Lento e molto cantabile

Allegro non tanto

The Ab quartet is one of fourteen quartets written during Dvorak's career. It was started while Dvorak was still in America, and was completed in 1895 along with the G major quartet, op. 106, its compositional mate. The opus 105 received its first public performance in 1896 and was very well received.

The first movement opens with an adagio introduction initiated by a one bar fragment, which is imitated in ascending order, from cello to violin, by each of the respective parts. This fourteen-bar section is written in Ab minor, with all its seven flats, plus a host of accidentals. The movement as a whole, is a sonata-allegro structure, based on two themes, the first, a lyrical first violin melody appearing in the tonic key of Ab major, the second, a driving, full-textured theme in the customary dominant key. Following a short development section, the first theme is reiterated in the dominant, while the second theme now returns to the tonic key. Alluding to the slow introduction, the coda, an elided version of the first theme, appears at a more tranquil tempo.

Dvorak has placed, as did Smetana, a Scherzo as the second movement. The intrigue of this movement is the adoption of the last twelve bars of the opening theme for the purpose of a countertheme, which is not only used against new material, but which doubles back on its own parent theme.

The finale, though certainly not of the most terse form, is a veritable inventory of rhythmic and melodic ideas. Although of relatively great length, recurrence of thematic material is rather rare. (notes by Mary Rizza di Sardi)

Next Event: Saturday, March 2, 1974 — University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra

Next Thursday Evening Series: March 28, 1974 — Igor Kipnis, Harpsichord